

The Chimera of Privacy: Reading Self-Discipline in Japanese Diaries from the Second World War (1937–1945)

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This article has two main goals for its examination of wartime diaries: (1) to argue against the idea that a diary's reliability is directly related to the degree of privacy that its author enjoyed, and (2) to suggest an alternate use for these texts by scholars—namely, the construction of the author's concept of self through acts of "self-discipline." The article briefly outlines military diary writing and reportage in modern Japan, showing how "fact" and "truth" came to be understood in diaries. Through an examination of published and manuscript diaries, the article addresses theoretical premises such as "intended audience," "private language," and the nature of "privacy" itself. Finally, the article provides an alternative reading of diaries: The texts represent the author's attempt to construct a compelling and coherent subject position. Because diarists are involved in the construction of their identities, the article suggests that scholars use diaries to move beyond examinations of subjectivity solely reliant on disciplinary institutions.

It is easy to investigate others and dole out punishment. It is more difficult when, examining others' imperfections and calling attention to them, one critiques oneself as well. ... I want think slowly and write with care. I want to discipline myself. I must discipline myself.

—Nakamura Tokurō, Japanese army officer, December 15, 1942¹

IN AN INTERVIEW I conducted in February 2003, Okamoto Masa, a former "special attack pilot" (*tokkōtai*, or kamikaze), read his wartime diary to me, repeating aloud the ultranationalistic rhetoric that he had once embraced. When I asked him how reading the diary made him feel today, he replied, "Without this diary, I would have probably believed like everyone else that I was dragged unwillingly into the war, that I never accepted this propaganda.

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¹Diary (*shūyōroku*) of Nakamura Tokurō, entry dated December 15, 1942, in the volume *Tennō heika no tame nari* (1986), edited by the Wadatsumi-kai. For more information on the Wadatsumi-kai and their role in the postwar publication of wartime personal accounts, see Franziska Seraphim (2006).

This diary is essential to my self-reflection.”² Ironically, the term “self-reflection” (*hansei*) was made into common parlance among the Japanese armed forces as an effort to teach servicemen self-discipline and make them better soldiers. Guided or peer-reviewed diary writing practices had been in existence in East Asian militaries since before Okamoto was born, and the title often given to training diaries for officers and pilots was, in fact, “Record of Self-Reflection” (*hanseiroku*).³ An “education officer” could review these diaries at any time, and thus the documents represent the increasing intrusion of the state into the “private lives” of individual servicemen. The diaries are textual incarnations of state discipline and were as effective as any institution analyzed by theorists of subjectivity and power.⁴ Visitors to Chiran (arguably the spiritual hometown of the kamikaze pilots) may encounter obstreperous tour guides who criticize wartime diaries, as well as farewell letters and poems, as “inauthentic” products of coercion. To discover the “true” thoughts of a soldier, they proclaim, one must seek out “private” diaries.⁵ In fact, the putative boundary of privacy is, at best, impossible to define and, at worst, a chimera that surreptitiously served (and continues to serve) the disciplinary goals of powerful organizations such as the state.

For the moment, it is easier to address this issue within the context of Japanese history, but the phenomenon of self-discipline through diary writing was definitely transnational. Research on the experience of Stalinism, for example, has focused on how individuals contribute to the construction of their subjectivity and the connections between publicly and privately expressed selves.⁶ In the Japanese case, however, issues of state discipline and individual agency, particularly with regard to the thorny issue of privacy and censorship, are particularly interesting because of the diversity and profundity of wartime diaries there, even if Japan is not “special” when it comes to wartime censorship policies.⁷ Because of the

²Personal interview at Okamoto’s office, February 1, 2003. Many thanks to the staff at the Wadatsumi-kai Tokyo office for arranging this interview.

³By the time of the Second World War, both pilot trainees and officers were engaged in guided diary writing as a part of their training. See “Morita Tatsuo,” “Hanseiroku,” 1936, Sendai Japanese History Museum; and “Ueda Masaki,” “Hanseiroku,” 1942, Ritsumeikan International Peace Museum. Morita was a pilot trainee and Ueda was in enrolled in a noncommissioned officer program. Sometimes the term “Record of Self-Cultivation” (*shūyōroku*) was used.

⁴The most obvious examples are Michel Foucault’s important studies of discipline and subjectivity, including *Naissance de la clinique: Une archéologie du regard médical* (1963) and *Surveiller et punir: Naissance de la prison* (1975).

⁵I have addressed the use of the terms “true” and “truth” in a separate article featured on *Japan Focus*, entitled “Essential Ingredients of Truth: Soldiers’ Diaries in the Asia-Pacific War” (Moore 2007).

⁶Jochen Hellbeck (2006) and Igal Halfin (2003) are both excellent studies of subjectivity. Like historians of Japan, scholars of the Soviet Union have also made an effort to translate diaries. Cynthia Simmons and Nina Perlina (2005) and Veronique Garros, Natalia Korenevskaya, and Thomas Lahusen (1997) are particularly notable.

⁷Many historians of modern Japan have been understandably concerned with issues such as censorship, freedom of speech, and the effects of print media on the public. See Richard H. Mitchell (1976, 1984), Andrew Barshay (1988), Gregory Kasza (1988), and, most recently, Barak Kushner (2006).

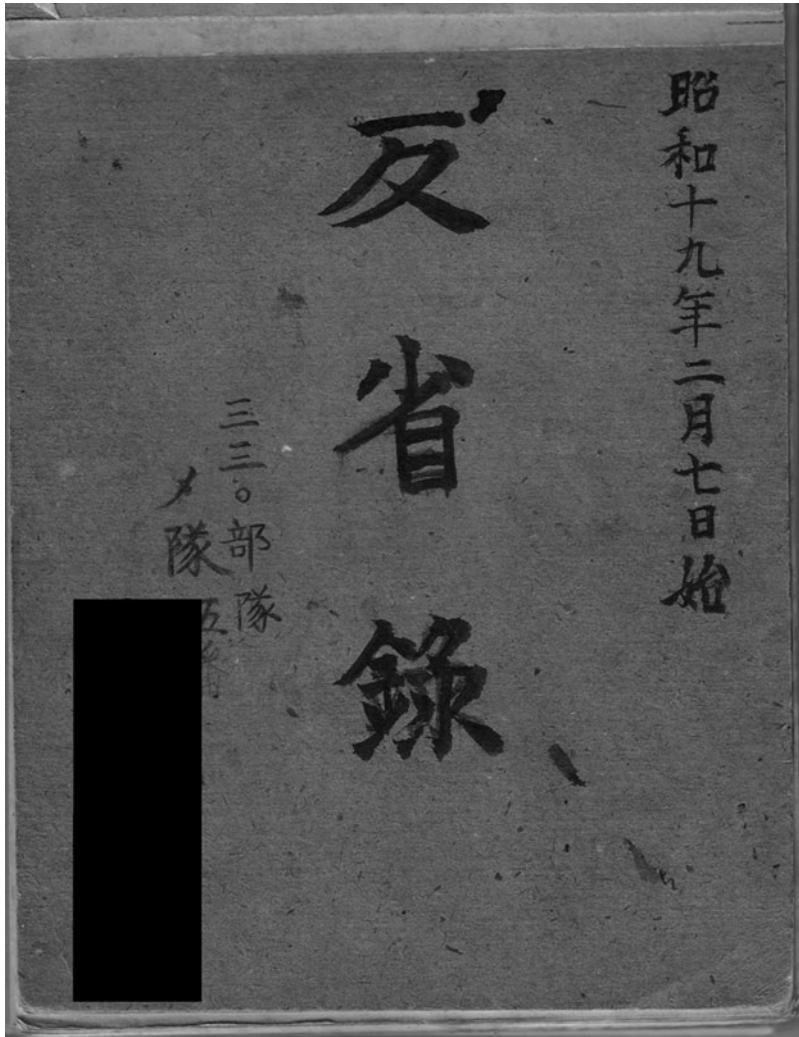


Figure 1. “Record of Self-Reflection” (author’s name removed). Courtesy of Osaka International Peace Museum.

widespread perception that Japan was an *especially* censored society, a prevalent theme in Japanese historiography claims that ordinary Japanese were coerced unwillingly down a “dark path” during the 1930s as a result of the seizure of state power by military interests.⁸ Scholars of “transwar” history and Japanese democracy before the Second World War have criticized this viewpoint, pointing

⁸This position was first articulated in English by American occupation forces seeking to separate the Japanese people from the military (primarily in order to punish the latter). It was later expressed in a scholarly volume by Thomas R. H. Havens (1978). This narrative continues to enjoy popularity in Japan, however, because it is convenient for those who are uncomfortable with the popular support for imperialism prior to the occupation. For example, when the Saitama Prefectural Peace Museum opened in 1999, exhibits concerning Japan’s expansion during the 1930s were only accessible through a dark tunnel. Halfway through this corridor was a foot-thick “rip” around the tunnel

to the massive popular support that wars of aggression received from the Japanese public, particularly after the first Sino-Japanese War (1894–95).⁹ Similarly, scholars of modern China (and Korea) have argued among one another, just as the Chinese Communists and the Nationalists (Guomindang, or GMD) did, over the private loyalties of the “people,” particularly during the Second World War; both sides accuse the other of coercion during wartime mobilization. If, however, we consider the individual’s contribution to his own subjectification through the lens of diary writing, as opposed to one government’s efforts versus another’s, we may more accurately evaluate the success of mobilization campaigns not only during war, but at any time, and not only in Japan, but in any country.

In the Japanese case, for many reasons, the existence of published and unpublished, peer-reviewed and “private,” wartime and postwar “diaries” provides a particularly ideal platform from which to investigate how important “privacy” was to diary writing.¹⁰ Furthermore, diaries show us which messages were most effective in garnering popular support for the war effort.¹¹ In my own work, I have used the term “self-discipline,” which draws on the Foucauldian notion of the social discipline of subjects, but I add the prefix “self” to emphasize that these acts are conducted by the individual on himself. Although these acts are not carried out directly by institutions such as schools, prisons, or barracks, external influences are quite powerful in determining forms self-disciplinary behavior. These self-disciplinary acts can be detected through diary writing, for example: “self-mobilization,” which describes admonitions to act (“I must go in first!”) and “self-criticism,” which involves castigating oneself for failing to embody normative behaviors, thoughts, and feelings (“I did not go into battle—I am a coward!”). Self-discipline need not operate so obviously, however, as any attempt to describe oneself—positively or negatively—can be construed as an act of defining both identity and worldview, and therefore will function as a basis for decision making. Also, examining self-discipline in diary writing helps us understand how mobilization “works” at its most basic level: the individual. Although scholars familiar with poststructuralist

itself, illuminated by red lights, signifying a supposed rupture in the course of Japanese history in the decade preceding the Second World War.

⁹The most effective criticisms of the “dark path” viewpoint have come from Andrew Gordon (1991) and Sheldon Garon (1997). Also, notably, John W. Dower rejected the premise of unhappy coercion in his book *War without Mercy* (1985).

¹⁰Elsewhere I have analyzed the history of peer-reviewed diary writing in the Japanese military and the connection it has to styles of “private” diary writing (Moore 2006, chap. 1). The history is far too complex to review here, but generally, servicemen were exposed to various forms of expression and styles of diary writing in school, through the mass media, and in the military.

¹¹There are many scholars of Japan who have recognized the importance of individual motivations, such as they can be known, in state-led campaigns; the importance of examining individual motivations is strongly emphasized in Samuel Hideo Yamashita’s translations of wartime diaries (2005), in Theodore F. Cook and Haruko Taya Cook (1992), and in Emiko Ohnuki-Tierney (2005). I have gone into detail in my dissertation (Moore 2006, chap. 2–5) on how U.S., Japanese, and Chinese servicemen exercised considerable agency in their own subjectification.

theory will undoubtedly recognize the power of disciplinary organizations, it is often unclear how effective they are—we see the process, but not the product. Analyzing self-disciplinary acts, such as those in diaries, show us how well the “message” was received. “Privacy,” in addition to being illusory, is thus also somewhat dangerous, because our belief in its existence obfuscates the process by which we come to know ourselves, and how much that process is influenced by institutions such as the state and mass media.

The next logical question to ask is, did Japanese servicemen even believe they enjoyed “privacy”? Scholars of wartime Japan are quick to point out that a system of inspections made the composition of diaries very difficult for servicemen, but there are a number of problems with this approach.¹² First, it would seem obvious that officers had more to contend with than diary writers when commanding a unit on the battlefield. Furthermore, pocket-sized diaries (*techō*) made furtive diary writing possible, if sometimes challenging. Many veterans can delineate the sundry tricks for avoiding possible confiscation of one’s personal records: tying the diary to the inside of one’s thigh, sending it through civilian mail during temporary furlough, or entrusting the diary to a friend who was being sent home through a military hospital (where no inspections occurred).¹³ Additionally, whenever the term is found in official military records, it is not entirely clear what an “inspection” (*ken’etsu*) consisted of: Sometimes it meant examining the state of the unit’s equipment, the cleanliness of the barracks, or a soldier’s ability to recite the “Imperial Rescript to Soldiers and Sailors.” Anecdotal evidence—culled from interviews and diaries—indicates that inspections officers searched for diaries primarily whenever servicemen were being prepared for a massive repatriation. This agrees with observations made by Japanese historians that the state was first and foremost concerned about the chaos of the battlefield affecting mobilization efforts at home.¹⁴ Even official “field diaries” were

¹²The inspection (*ken’etsu*) system is poorly understood, but nearly every scholar who works on the Japanese military acknowledges its existence (see Fujii 2000; Yoshimi 1987; see also see notes 13 and 14 herein).

¹³I learned many of these “tricks” during interviews I conducted with Japanese veterans in the Chinese Returnee Memorial Association (*Chūgoku kikō renrakukai*) in the spring of 2003. (This organization, whose membership consists of veterans who were “re-educated” in China, runs its own Web site, www.ne.jp/asahi/tyuukiren, and now operates a museum in Kawagoe.) U.S. armed forces supposedly proscribed diary writing even more strictly, but diaries from the South Pacific campaigns reveal that U.S. Marine Corps commanding officers, even after using Japanese diaries as intelligence documents, were unable to prevent servicemen from writing. Thomas Serier, U.S. Marine Corps, complained that the bunks on his troopship “are only 18 inches apart, and lying down writing is quite a job.” William Heggy was concerned about losing his diary detailing the Guadalcanal invasion, so he went so far as to lock it in a bank vault while on furlough in Australia. See Thomas Serier, “Diary of a U.S. Marine of World War II,” January 21, 1943, United State Marine Corps Archives (USMCA); and William Heggy, “Perpetual Date Book,” August 24, 1942, USMCA.

¹⁴Yoshimi Yoshiaki provides several examples of Japanese state regulations on returning soldiers and their behavior (1987, 34). Similarly, Chinese legal and executive government decisions reveal concerns about the control of communication between the front and rear. In one case,

reviewed by superior officers only periodically, and it is still unclear what practices such a review might consist of. The fact that Japanese servicemen frequently entitled their personal records “field diaries” (*jinchū nikki/nisshi*), in direct imitation of a “public” form of self-expression, suggests that the line between public and private self was tenuous at best.

More importantly, social conventions and the Japanese print media were certainly working against any attempt by military authorities to quash diary writing; in fact, it seems hardly possible that the Japanese armed forces were really determined to do any such thing. Diary writing was a Japanese modern military tradition since its inception in the late 1860s. Following the Russo-Japanese War (1904–5), officers such as Tamon Jirō published their personal diaries in order to teach military men about proper soldiering.¹⁵ Besides the massive market for civilian pocket diaries, the mobilization for total war against the GMD (following the Ōyama Incident in Shanghai in 1937) led to even greater opportunities for diary writing among servicemen; publishers mass produced “Army Diaries” (*jūgun techō*) specifically so that troops shipping off for duty would have a space to record their thoughts and experiences. As state-led social mobilization intensified during the Pacific War (and the market for such pocket diaries expanded dramatically with increased conscription), so, too, did publishers’ efforts. The appearance of other texts such as “Holy War Diaries” (*seisen techō*) signaled an increasing diversification of media interests profiting from servicemen’s desire to pen self-narratives. By the end of the war, the Japanese Army was even cooperating with women’s groups and publishers to help direct the production of *jūgun techō* under the auspices of one of its own organizations: the “Land Army Courageous Soldiers Section” (*Rikugun juppei-bu*). If the Japanese armed forces strictly proscribed diary writing, why were they helping publishers mass produce them for troops shipping off to war?¹⁶ Similar practices in the U.S. military suggest that Japan was not unique in this regard.¹⁷

correspondence was supposed to be vetted by local government officials. See “Fu(shi)zhang-chu,” “Di-10 jituanjun yu Zhejiang Yiwu dengdi zhenzhong riji,” Second National Archives, August 5, 1938. Ironically, U.S. Marine Lieutenant Stanley Rich’s diary, which he had neglected to put in the “back of [his] shirt,” was confiscated and burned during an inspection for repatriation—Rich often helped to censor his company’s correspondence. See Stanley Rich, “Addenda #1,” USMCA.
¹⁵Tamon Jirō’s diary was originally published in 1912 as *Yo no sankā shitaru NichiRo sen’eki*. He believed that it would be good for “young cadets with no experience of war” and that it would provide material for “readers’ future self-cultivation” (*dokusha shōrai shūyō*).

¹⁶See “Jūgun techō” unsigned, 1937, Ritsumeikan University International Peace Museum; “Seisen techō,” unsigned, 1944, Soldiers’ and Common Peoples’ War Museum; and “Jūgun techō,” unsigned, 1942, Ritsumeikan University International Peace Museum. In fact, the diary was made available to troops free of charge thanks to the “Courageous Soldiers’ Fund” raised by civilians working with the military; the diary was most likely included in “comfort packages” (*imonbukuro*) that consisted of, among other things, cigarettes, postcards (*gunji yūbin*), and candy.

¹⁷Social support for “our troops” is perhaps as old as war itself, but the introduction of mass-produced “war diaries” was rather new. See pre-printed “Service Diary,” including “Thoughts



Figure 2. “War Diary,” inside cover. Courtesy of Ritsumeikan International Peace Museum.

As the example of Okamoto Masa suggests, diaries, even when composed under observation, are not usually rejected by their authors as pure fabrication (although the same is not always true for letters and postcards). Even if a diary of this sort does not tell the “whole truth,” it stands as an invaluable record of the author’s life. Pilot Nishimoto Masaharu recalled receiving an order at the end of the war to burn his training diaries (subject to superior review); as he stood before the fire, he disobeyed this order and saved one notebook, writing

of Service Days,” 1944, James D. Hopkins, University of Tennessee Library. Even the War Area Service Corps in China produced a special version of a war diary for their servicemen, complete with Chinese holiday reminders and quotations from Confucius. See Alfred Trampusch, “War Area Service Corps Diary,” 1945, James D. Hopkins, University of Tennessee Library. It is very likely that these blank diaries were given to U.S. troops by the Red Cross, along with, as one might guess, cigarettes, postcards (V-mail), and candy. In some cases, “official” logbooks were also used as diaries. See William Heggy, “Operators Log,” 1943–45, USMCA. Chinese Nationalist war diaries were often written on paper printed especially for the unit, with the division number printed on the margins of the blank diary.

in the forward to its publication that it was his personal record, “which I held close to my heart without thinking—it brought tears to my eyes.”¹⁸ Although diaries could be “public” or “official,” Japanese military commanders in the modern era described them as a “mirror of truth” (*makoto no kagami*) and even as a “last will and testament” (*igonsho*).¹⁹ The importance of keeping reliable, factual records pervaded the diary writing practices of most, if not all, modern armies.²⁰

Such obsessions with “fact” were as ubiquitous in “private” records as they were in “public” ones, and often both forms used the same language to express “truth.” At the end of his training for the war in China, Kimura Genzaemon wrote the following entry in anticipation of his departure from Hirosaki in 1937:

6am lecture from the squad commander. Dreams of the battlefield and running about the barracks. Every night my dreams are not about my home, not about my wife and children, but actually an image of myself on the battlefield. The most beautiful thing in the world is “truth,” an “image of one who seeks truth,” a “process toward truth.” If there is anything beautiful about war, it is that “truth” that only war can possess.

While methodically recording the date, weather, and troop movements, Kimura reflected on what the war meant to him and why he was participating in it as a soldier. Like officers and pilots who had been trained before him, Kimura not only saw his diary as a factual record, but also as a last will and testament: He wrote an extended farewell letter in his diary addressed to his wife and children. If he could only embody a life of “truth,” he wrote, even if he was “covered in blood and tortured by all the pains of this earth,” he could face his children after the war.²¹ Even if a serviceman did not ponder the meaning of the word “truth” itself, the act of strictly recording every detail of his war experience—including location, weather, and the names of friends and commanding officers—reveals the extent to which diary writers during the war were quite different from the literary elites who might play with the rhetoric of truth that surrounded these texts. A phony diary, while amusing, was perhaps of less value to a serviceman than one that helped him remember important personal events accurately.

Here we encounter a critical problem: If most servicemen were trying to compose “truthful” accounts, does that make them more “reliable?” Is it

¹⁸Nishimoto Masaharu, *Yokaren nikki* (2003, 6).

¹⁹See “Morita Tatsuo,” “Hanseiroku,” March 18, 1936, p. 25, Sendai Museum of Japanese History. These comments were made by “Morita’s” education officer, written in red ink into Morita’s diary after review.

²⁰On October 1, 1937, the commander of the Chinese Nationalist Sixteenth Army Corps felt compelled to instruct his officers on the proper form for their diaries. He suggested that the documents might one day be studied by “experts” in order to compose a “military history” that would narrate their achievements and areas for “improvement and reform” (*gaishan yu xiuzheng*). See “Di-16 juntuan silingbu zhenzhong rijii,” Second National Archives.

²¹Kimura Genzaemon, *Nicchū sensō shussei nikki* (1982, 16–17).

unreasonable to assume that the authors of diaries, such as Patricia Highsmith's protagonist in *Edith's Diary*, might lie to themselves? There are a number of methodological pitfalls that must be addressed before these questions can be answered.

The first theoretical bugbear inherent in the study of personal documents is that of "intended audience"; perceptions of intended audience often inform our beliefs about the degree of "reliability" a text might enjoy, but diaries are very unstable documents and thus defy some of the tools used by textual analysts. First, authorial "intention," if defined as a mental event, is mostly unknowable. Second, even when it is defined generically (such as when authors use epistolary address: "My son, I will see you soon"), the "intended audience" of a personal document is extremely difficult to pin down. For example, after reading his wartime pocket diary (*techō*) sometime in the early postwar era, "Kogura Isamu" found that the text contained many errors, bad handwriting, and Chinese characters that he had written incorrectly. Kogura photocopied pages of the diary and taped them into a notebook. Beneath the copied pages of the wartime document, he ironed the rough edges out of his personal account and composed a smoother, more coherent self-narrative in his new "diary."²² He probably went to veterans' group meetings or the local library, or, like many ex-servicemen, sojourned at Tokyo's National Institute for Defense Studies in order to correct factual errors such as the names of his commanders, Chinese place names, and the dates and times for certain events. He may have read published diaries, reportage and memoirs, or relied on the self-published diaries of friends to find the proper information and appropriate language for his refurbished diary. His many changes were not only stylistic, but also sometimes affected the content of his diary. Was he changing the audience? What was his "intent"?

None of the tools mentioned earlier had been available to Kogura during the war, and certainly there were many eyes watching him at that time. As it turns out, however, even when rewriting the diary after the war, he was still as involved in what might be called "self-censorship." During the war, many servicemen "updated" their diaries as well (this was a popular pastime for wounded soldiers stuck in field hospitals). This could involve, for example, adding detailed descriptions from memory or merely copying a ruined pocket notebook onto other paper.²³ Sometimes this involved a subtle change of the text in order to

²²This process was also used by Azuma Shirō, perhaps Japan's most famous wartime diary author, when he converted a "field notebook" (*jinchū memo*, written during his period of active service, 1937–40) into a more readable narrative "diary" (*nikki*, 1940–44), which was even further altered when he released it as a piece of war literature (*Wa ga Nankin Puratōn*, 1988). Xie Bingying's *Xin congjun riji* (A New War Diary, 1938) was based on notes she took in a pocket-sized notepad 4 inches long and 2 inches wide, writing in characters "as small as peas." See Xie Bingying (1981).

²³I suspect that the latter was the case for "Hamabe Genbei" of Shizuoka. Although he died of an infection during the war with China in 1937, he managed to copy his notebook onto clean sheets of paper. The account is too terse to have been a self-fashioned "literary diary," but too detailed to be written from scratch. See "Hamabe Genbei," "Jinchū nisshi," 1937, Shizuoka Peace Museum.

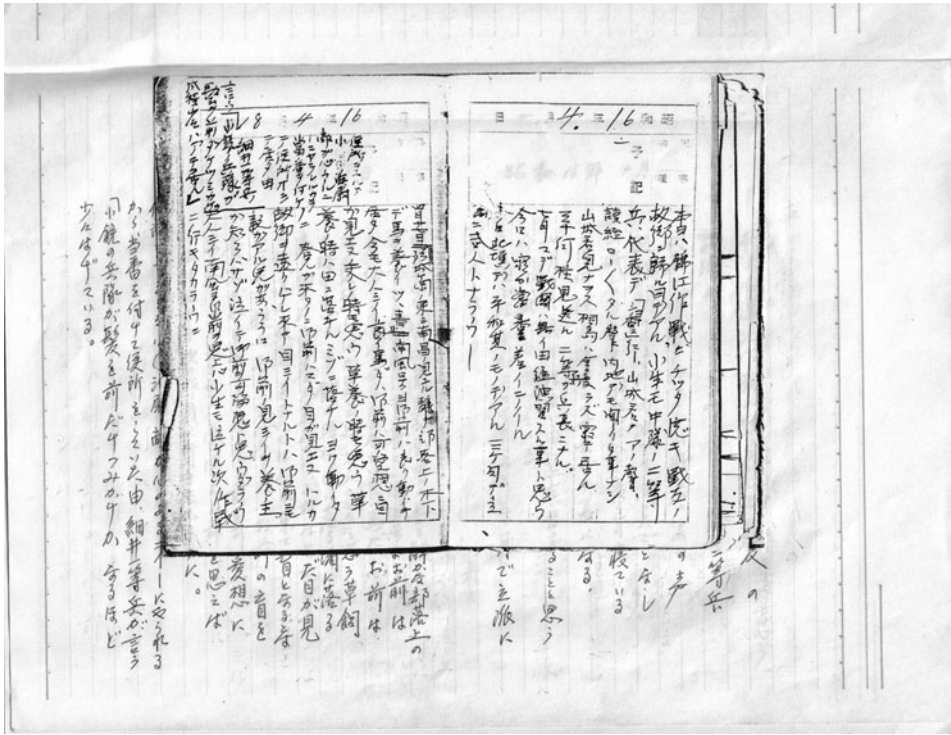


Figure 3. Diary of “Kogura Isamu.” Courtesy of Ritsumeikan International Peace Museum.

reshape its tone. In Kogura’s *postwar* notebook for March 21, 1941, he wrote, “I am still alive after yesterday’s battle. Today we will launch an assault. I am determined to die. Father! Brother! Yuki! I think myself fortunate to die by a machine-gun’s bullet.” The *wartime* pocket diary entry is somewhat different. Here is what Kogura removed from his original diary from the same date:

It’s clearer tonight than before. Some aircraft came through the night. Our planes are firing their machineguns. It is an unspeakable [illegible] they’re doing it over and over again. This morning at first light, when I was sleeping, the bullets came zipping right over my head, so they woke me up ... I’m so tired, so, please, from here on out, will you planes give us a break when we’re sleeping?²⁴

Perhaps he felt the original entry made him look too cowardly, did not fit the mold of other diaries he had read, or just did not make for good reading; we simply do not know. Furthermore, in one journal entry, Kogura addressed friends, family, the enemy, and even used popular

²⁴See “Kogura Isamu,” “Kogura nikki,” March 12, 1941, Ritsumeikan International Peace Museum (it is unclear when he composed the postwar notebook).

jingoistic rhetoric common in wartime discourse. Determining who his “intended” audience was is like trying to catch the wind, precisely because this audience, even within the text itself, is continually changing. Popular misconceptions about East Asian societies’ “lack” of a concept of privacy do not hold here—similar phenomena are quite easy to find in the diaries of American servicemen.²⁵

A more serious erosion of the boundaries of the “private world” comes in the form of language itself. In the philosophy of language, it was Ludwig Wittgenstein who famously offered a strong refutation of the possibility of “private languages.”²⁶ Even if an individual managed to develop a “private language,” what would he say? To whom would he say it? More importantly, servicemen lived for long periods of time in tightly knit homosocial groups; it is unusual that they would search for a language in order to isolate themselves and more likely they would strive to strengthen bonds of camaraderie for the purposes of survival. Consequently, servicemen developed their own group language. Troops in the Japanese Army substituted personal pronouns for “I” (*watakushi*, etc.) with the indefinite “myself/oneself” (*jibun*), using these forms in their diaries to express individual membership within a larger group.²⁷ They further expressed their tight group cohesion in their diaries by calling the nonmilitary world the “provinces” (*chihō*) and civilians “provincials” (*chihōjin*).²⁸ Japanese servicemen’s diaries and even spoken language were peppered with cognates from Chinese, revealing the deep impact the occupation of China had on the armed forces. In postwar Japan, with many men returning after enduring long years on the front, newspapers printed glossaries of “soldierese” (*heitaigo*) to help civilians understand them. “Soldierese” included pidgin phrases derived from spoken Chinese, but given with a distinct Japanese accent. For example,

²⁵Ralph Noonan started off writing a disciplined military diary and then began addressing his diary to his wife and young son. See Captain Ralph T. Noonan, “Daily Desk Calendar for 1942” and untitled document, January 1, 1943, United States Military History Institute. Joseph Griffith, too, noted that he was keeping the diary for his family and his fiancée, but also as a “guide for future narrative.” Presumably he would not include information about his dates with “native” women, if he had the chance to edit his account. Nevertheless, the phrase “if and when” appears when he discusses his intent to tell his fiancée about his life at war, suggesting he was aware that the diary could fall into her hands in the event of his death. See Joseph Griffith, “Diary,” July 2, 1942, USMCA. George Gallion even allowed his war buddy Don Henderson to write in his diary, creating a shared space. See George F. Gallion, “Diary,” March 18, 1944, USMCA.

²⁶Wittgenstein’s argument begins on paragraph 243 of *Philosophical Investigations* (1953). My reading of Wittgenstein’s theory is in part inspired by Saul A. Kripke’s *Wittgenstein on Rules and Private Language* (1982).

²⁷When delivering official reports or any other situation requiring more specificity, servicemen used their surname and rank: for example, “Private First Class Nakane.” See one of the many informative notations in Noguchi Fumio (1982, 22).

²⁸See Nakamura (1986, 32). This term was explained as it appeared in the diary of Private Nakamura Tokurō, October 14, 1942.

when demanding that something be done quickly, instead of simply saying “hurry up” in standard Japanese, servicemen said *kai-kai dē* (*kuai kuai de* in Chinese).²⁹ American servicemen could be seen forming strict group order in similar ways, despite the country’s supposed commitment to individualism.³⁰ This internal linguistic order was enforced both horizontally by one’s comrades and vertically by commanding officers. Even if one accepts that the concept of privacy has been a result of historical developments such as consumer capitalism and property rights, the restructuring of the national socioeconomy for the purposes of war mobilization eroded these fabricated boundaries—and the tightly knit social world of the soldier was perhaps the most group oriented of all.

On top of this, wartime discourse was primarily defined by powerful mass media, state, and military interests. Japanese servicemen also used the language of war reportage and war literature in their personal narratives; investigating the mutual influence between authors of published war narratives and authors of unpublished personal documents is necessary for treating these texts critically. Fortunately, translations of works by Ishikawa Tatsuzō and Hino Ashihei into English have generated some scholarly interest in Japanese wartime reporting and literature.³¹ As Charles Laughlin has pointed out, separating news reporting from literature results in a misleading dichotomy; many wartime publications were first serialized in newspapers—as untested fiction continues to be today. Many servicemen even submitted portions of their diaries for publication during the war, consciously transgressing the public/private barrier. “Taniguchi Kazuo,” a field medic in China, began to write an article about the dramatic and narrow escape from certain death he had experienced in November 1937 that was based on his diary: “Maybe when it is finished,” he wrote, “I might be so bold as to submit it to the Empress.”³²

²⁹See “Rōtarii: heitaigo,” *Shūkan asashi*, December 11, 1949, p. 21. These Chinese terms were in fact introduced into servicemen’s vocabulary by military and state officials, who printed glossaries in the back of blank diaries for those serving in China.

³⁰Walter E. Lee, an officer in the U.S. Navy, recalled the terms used by the new group to which he belonged: “I learned a new language like ‘What’s the dope,’ ‘Chow,’ and everyone in the Navy being called ‘Mac.’” See Walter E. Lee, “Diary Excerpts” (composed sometime between September 16, 1939, and November 17, 1944), James D. Hopkins, University of Tennessee Library. Similarly, William Heggy noted during his basic training on Parris Island: “Rumors are called ‘scuttle bug [written above:] butt’ Anything you don’t like is ‘shit for the birds.’ Anything hard is ‘tough shit’ Sailors are called ‘swab jockies’ army boys are ‘dog faces.’” See Heggy, February 2, 1942, USMCA.

³¹Most recently, Zeljko Cipris translated Ishikawa Tatsuzō’s *Ikite iru heitai* (2003), and David Rosenfeld produced a monograph on Hino Ashihei (2002). Both are scholars of literature. Historians Louise Young (1998) and Barak Kushner (2005) have also examined reportage sources as part of larger projects on Japanese imperial and wartime propaganda, respectively.

³²See “Taniguchi Kazuo,” “Field Hospital Diary” (*Yasen byōin nishshi*), December 13, 1937, Osaka International Peace Museum. In the Chinese case, a portion of GMD officer Yu Yanling’s diary circulated widely. See Yu Yanling, “My Ten Days of Living at War” (*Wo de shitian zhanzheng shenghuo*), 1937, National Archives. It was then re-published as “Ten Days on the Front” (*Qianxian 10-tian*, 1938), which was a collection of servicemen’s first-person accounts.

fighting man in order to imbibe soldiers' quotidian speech—even while maintaining narrative distance from them in order to appear “objective.” Hino was a well-known author, however; published accounts penned by individuals of lesser prestige could be quite different. While Hino attempted to maintain some degree of narrative distance from his soldier subjects (as a professional journalist), others simply reproduced servicemen's discourse in order to give their writings greater authenticity.³³

Popular accounts of soldiering in Japan have helped to shape the language with which servicemen described combat throughout the first half of the twentieth century. During the Second World War, Japanese “tales of heroism” (*bidan*) returned to the scene from previous eras of reportage and enjoyed wide circulation. *Kingu*, one of Japan's most popular pulp journals, published such “tales” written by (or cowritten by) Japanese servicemen that scripted every aspect of a soldier's life: saying farewell, induction into the unit, descriptions of the intense fighting in central China, heroic deaths, and the sad return of servicemen's remains. These accounts even provided dialogues from which servicemen could draw lessons regarding appropriate language and comportment for daily life on the battlefield. One commanding officer consoled another who began sobbing over his men's sacrifices: “You did a good job, son, and it was tough ... No need to cry. It's war. Don't cry, now. Here, how about some whiskey?”³⁴ “Paper plays” (*kamishibai*) tried to capture the lived experience and dreams of Japanese men serving in mainland China. Designed primarily for selling candy to children, *kamishibai*, a series of illustrations narrated by the candy salesman, also served to make soldiering both accessible and palatable to a general audience. Such plays frequently equated soldiering with adventurism, such as the myth of Momotarō. A soldier's desire to see his mother was a popular theme in wartime media, aimed at binding men in the same unit more closely together. Nevertheless, bringing home and hearth to the battlefield made such texts highly unstable and open to interpretation: Japanese servicemen working for the GMD used the theme of “a soldier's mother” as a basis

³³A similar contradiction in narrative proximity and distance can be seen in Chinese, Soviet, and American wartime reportage. For the Chinese example, see Charles A. Laughlin (2002). In the United States, Richard Tregaskis (1943) was determined to capture authentic servicemen's banter, even when their language was terribly violent or prurient. See especially p. 26 (“F— you, Mac ... The trouble with you is you never met a virgin.”) and 121 (“As the Jap came toward us there were angry shouts from the marines. ‘Kill the bastard!’ they yelled. ‘Kick him in the b—!’”). Front and back matter were often produced to assure the audience of the author's authority on soldiering. Such practices continue today. For example, Nikolai Inozemtsev's *Frontline Diary* (*Frontovoi dnevnik*, 2005) included the declaration “Nikolai went through the war like a soldier in the truest and noblest sense of the word” (17), which mirrors statements in war accounts by Hino Ashihei, Xie Bingying, and others.

³⁴*Kingu* shinnengo furoku (1938, 242). As early as 1928, *Kingu* had a circulation of 300,000 per month.

for antiwar propaganda.³⁵ In any event, reportage authors reproduced servicemen's language in order to make their stories more "truthful"; in fact, many of these popular press accounts bore names such as "A True Record of..." (*jitsuroku*) or "The Real Story of..." (*jikki*). In most cases, the history of modern Japanese mass media and its attempt to narrate a soldier's life was older than the servicemen themselves.

Another line of entry into the serviceman's discursive universe came in the form of epistolary writing. Prior to a serviceman's departure, local organizations such as the Women's Defense Organization (*Kokubō fujinkai*), Imperial Reservists Association (*Teikoku zaikyō gunjinkai*), or the Youth Group (*Seinendan*) might deliver a "Letter of Farewell" addressed to the "Hero of the Sacred War" (*seisen yūshi*). These documents rarely deviated from the popular understanding of the enemy, the purpose of the war, or the role of the individual serviceman.³⁶ For their part, servicemen usually drafted a final will and testament (*igonsho, yuigonsho*) that largely reiterated this ideology. In one example, the author encouraged his mother to embrace his dedication to the "greater obligation" (*daikō no michi*) and stated that he wished to give his "seven [reincarnated] lives to the country" (*shichishō hōkoku*)—both of which were popular phrases at the time. Characteristically binding wartime national goals with household and individual interest, the author also expressed his desire to "brighten the door of my household with honor" and exploit this "opportunity—no bigger than the eye of a needle."³⁷ When examining the epistolary discourse of servicemen in other nations during the war, it is clear that this was by no means a uniquely Japanese phenomenon.³⁸ Given this profundity of text, it is not surprising that

³⁵See Yamana Takasa, "Kamishibai: Kibidanko" 1943, Ritsumeikan International Peace Museum. In a touching scene, several men share stories of their mothers, and thereby intensify their bonds on the battlefield. These sessions are overseen by their platoon commander (*butaichō*). Meanwhile, antiwar prisoners of war working with the GMD in Chongqing at the "Peace Village" (*Heiwa-mura, Hepingcun*) produced a document entitled "What Is a Soldier's Mother?" (*Gunjin no haha to ha*, also Ritsumeikan). In this document, the author insisted that no mother would willingly send her son to die, and that the sons of Japan should return home for the sake of their mothers.

³⁶One letter inveighed against the "barbarity" of the GMD and stated boldly that the Nationalists had become China's "curse." See "Sōbetsu no ji," 1939, Osaka International Peace Museum.

³⁷See "Isho," date unknown, Osaka International Peace Museum. A serviceman might also buy "thank you" cards (*reijō*) for those who supported him, promising, for example, to "smash my bones and destroy my body for the sake of the nation." See "Hagaki," February 2, 1942, Fukushima Prefectural Museum.

³⁸Although GMD war correspondence is nearly impossible to come by today, evidence of "comfort letters" (*weilaixin*) can be found in wartime publications. A Chinese reporter wrote that he had read a letter sent to the front by a seven-year-old boy, who proclaimed, "When I get big, I'm definitely coming out there with you guys to kill those despicable Japs!" and laughed alongside the men. See Hai Zhong, "Yuexia zhenzhong fang zhanshi," October 16, 1938, Taipei, National Archives. GMD servicemen responded in a language remarkably similar to the Japanese: One noted that he would "be willing to split my body and smash my bones for mother just as I would plunge into boiling water and leap into fire for the nation." See Li Hong, "An Undelivered Letter



Figure 5. “Paper Play: Kibidanko.” Courtesy of Ritsumeikan International Peace Museum.

servicemen's diaries should initially so resemble official discourse; binding popular discourse to emotional personal events gave mobilizational rhetoric yet another path into the "private" sphere.

Although journalists often lifted much of their material from troops, for the most part servicemen turned to these language mavens in order to refine their own tales. One might not be surprised to see the upper crust of Japan's armed forces recapitulating popular discourse in their personal documents; wartime discourse is primarily adjuvant to mobilizing the masses to sacrifice, so the military elites would be the first to promote its suffusion in both "public" and "private." "Hara Kinosuke," a pilot who participated in the attack on Pearl Harbor, made his patriotism and commitment to being a soldier a part of his New Year's "resolutions":

I greet 1942, a year of great significance, with a body and mind as clear and clean as an azure sky ... In this year, more than any other, we must fulfill the Path of the Warrior (*bushi no michi*). This year, we must unleash the potential of the Japanese Spirit (*Yamato damashii*). This means we have to strengthen our bodies and minds, and wage war.³⁹

The similarity between official discourse and "private" narrative, however, was not limited to elites such as Hara. As in the case of Taniguchi Kazuo, mentioned earlier, the history of war reportage and tales of soldiering produced a culture of self-narratives about war experience by and for the common man—in fact, they might sell their literature and get paid for it! As Virginia Woolf shrewdly observed about women writers, "It might still be well to sneer at 'blue stockings with an itch for scribbling,' but it could not be denied that they could put money in their purses." Still, the "common man" initially felt compelled to turn to voices of authority, such as mass media representations of soldiering, to find "proper" expressions. "Sakaguchi Jirō" was an enlisted man in the Japanese Army from rural Nagano Prefecture. When his unit fought the GMD at Baoding (Hebei) in 1937, his diary became quite similar to the kinds of "official" reporting one might expect only to see in periodicals and newspapers:

We took off before dawn, got out of the truck, went to battle, took direct, concentrated fire from the city walls, and lost nearly the whole 3rd

Home" (*Yi feng weiji de jiaxin*), June 1, 1938, Taipei, National Archives. Soviet servicemen also adopted a heroic persona; notifying his comrade's mother on the death of her son, he wrote, "We have lost our very best comrade, but you have lost your own beloved son. He will not be forgotten in amongst our guardsmen. And you should bow down (*gorditsa*) before your own courageous son! Praise be to the heroes, who have fallen for our country!" (Batyaev 2005, 177).

³⁹See "Hara Kinosuke," "Tōyō nikki," January 1, 1942, Kanoya Air Self-Defense Forces Museum.

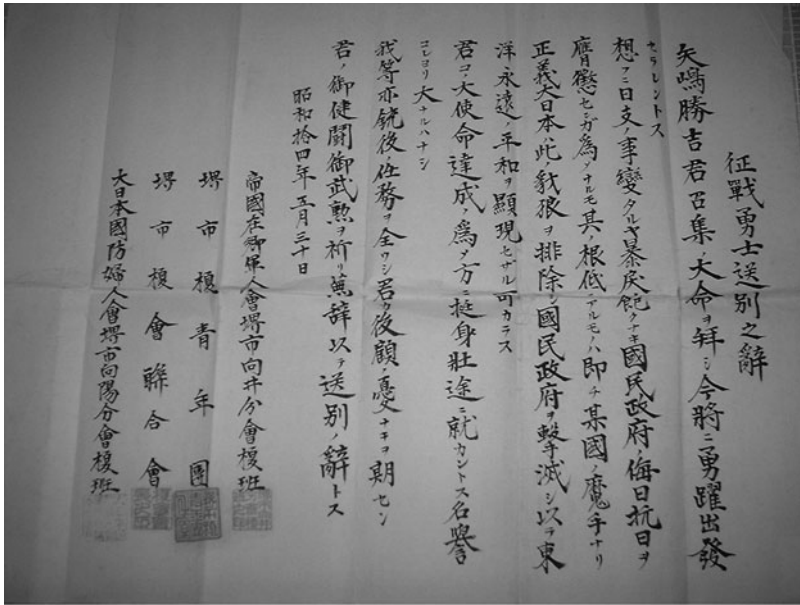


Figure 6. “Letter of Farewell” and “Final Testament.” Courtesy of Osaka International Peace Museum.

Battalion. It was 9am. Our 4th Platoon lost three men, seven wounded. The squad lost one, three wounded. At 11am, we shouted *Banzai*, and the Hi-no-maru flag was raised high. We were one hundred meters from the enemy. When we shouted *Banzai*, I was moved beyond control.⁴⁰

⁴⁰See “Sakaguchi Jirō,” “Jūgun nikki,” September 24–25, 1937, personal collection. Many thanks to Sakaguchi’s son for sharing his father’s diary.

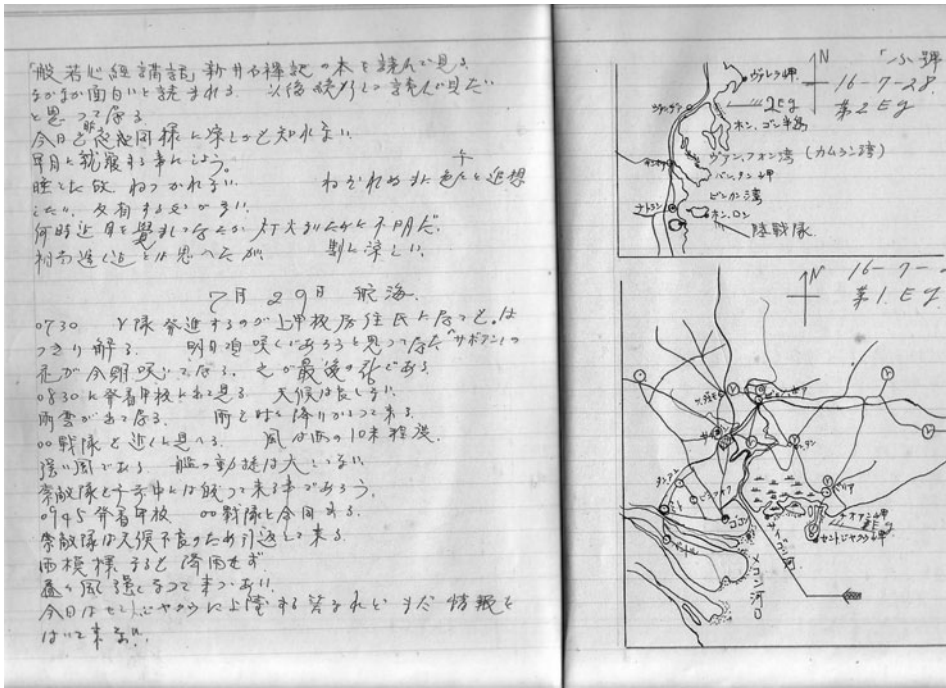


Figure 7. Diary of “Hara Kinosuke.” Courtesy of Kanoya Air Self-Defense Forces Museum.

Even intellectuals, who might be expected to be more critical of popular discourse, made Japan’s public understanding of the war a part of their personal story. Nakamura Tokurō, a student drafted out of Tokyo Imperial University during the “Student Mobilization” program (*gakuto shutsujin*), struggled to use his intellectual prowess and mastery of language in order that he might become a better soldier. When his education officer confronted him, Nakamura went beyond the anti-intellectualism of his sergeant in order to fuse his intellectual identity with his new role as a serviceman:

Just ruminating on empty rationalizations is meaningless, he said. But that theory is too shallow. It is useless (*toru ni taranai*). . . . At the moment of death, I will be fortunate if I can be satisfied and say, “No problem!” We need an everyday lifestyle that makes this possible. I can’t be one of those people who dies shouting, “Oh shit!” But most people are like this.⁴¹

Considering how soldiers borrow from authors and authors from soldiers, it is not strictly accurate to define a neat binary between “public” and “private” discourse; discourse itself is produced and reproduced by individuals until those boundaries become nearly meaningless. Yamanaka Sadao discovered this while writing his diary. Yamanaka was a film director and deeply involved in theater,

⁴¹See Nakamura Tokurō (1986, 44), December 7, 1942.

but he was participating in the war directly as an infantry sergeant. His incomplete “field diary” contained scenes he imagined for a future war film, intermingled seamlessly with descriptions of his daily life. He invented gags and silly dialogues starring personalities he knew from the war:

“What’s *wode*?”—“*Wode* is me in Chinese.”—“Oh, really?”—“Hey, *Wode* private first class!”—“*Wode* private first class? What are you saying?”—“It’s you, isn’t it? *Wode*.”—“No, *wode* is ‘me.’”—“Yeah, so, you’re *Wode* Private First Class.” “No, you idiot, *wode* is Chinese for ‘me.’ You don’t know a damn thing.”—“What the hell did you say? *You’re* the stupid ass.”

Yamanaka’s ad hoc mixture of the theatrical and the quotidian became so ingrained through diary writing that even his military drills came to resemble “play-acting” (*gokko*) in his fertile imagination (and capacity for biting sarcasm). In a personal diary such as this one, then, “truth” and “fiction” were not meaningfully distinguishable for the author—that is, until he was killed at Xuzhou in 1938.⁴² Yamanaka’s refusal to sincerely “play soldier” is unusual in these documents, and definitely reminiscent of the “I-novels” (*shishōsetsu*) with which he was undoubtedly familiar. Having said that, the document is not “unreliable,” either: The performances he concocted, along with his reservations about soldiering, were as much a reflection of his views about himself and the war as any sincere “confession.”⁴³

Considering the cruel end to Yamanaka’s story, perhaps now it is time to suggest an alternative to the public/private divide in the analysis of war diaries. After all, war diarists were trying to describe real experiences, and their decisions had very serious consequences. Although we should abandon the assumptions behind concepts such as “privacy” and “authenticity,” it might be inappropriate to discuss language and discourse in diary writing as if it replicates itself without regard to the sometimes extraordinary conditions under which it is composed. Understanding *why* and *how* individuals make decisions is critical to historiography; examining *why* and *how* they make decisions within their personal narratives is an excellent place for an historian to begin. A widely accepted approach to language and subjectivity is to examine institutions that discipline modern subjects, such as hospitals, schools, prisons, and military barracks. Such studies are limited, however, because they usually cannot evaluate how effective these institutions were. Instead, it is more useful to examine the results of self-disciplinary practices, whether they be designated “public” or

⁴²Yamanaka Sadao, “Jinchū nisshi” (1981, 275).

⁴³“I-novels” were notorious for their use (and abuse) of sincerity when narrating self, especially when adopting a confessional mode. They were also widely misunderstood by their reading audience, then and now, to be sincere self-accounts. See Edward Fowler (1988).

“private.” Abandoning the public/private divide is, in fact, part of a more accurate methodology in analyzing subjectivity and discipline altogether.

In order to see how self-discipline operates in the context of diary writing, let us examine two diaries closely: those of “Nagatani Masao” and “Yamamoto Kenji,” the first a sergeant and the second a reservist infantryman in the Eleventh Division (Zentsūji, Kagawa Prefecture). This division saw action in Shanghai from the beginning of hostilities between Nationalist China and Japan in the summer of 1937, and suffered heavy casualties. They also participated in many violent acts against Chinese noncombatants in areas where support for the GMD was particularly strong and armed resistance was fierce. The diaries of Nagatani and Yamamoto reveal how individuals struggled to change language to fit their ever-changing experience of war, and what the consequences of such acts of self-discipline might be.

During the mobilization for total war, servicemen engaged in acts that I have called “self-mobilization.”⁴⁴ Servicemen proactively borrowed from the popular accounts of soldiering, allowing these foreign voices to define their own; in so doing, they were directing themselves toward state and military mobilization goals. Nagatani Masao was engaged in such practices when he was called up for duty in August 1937. He described his departure from the port of Tadozu in language that imitated patriotic discourse: “[We] have taken up [our] path as soldiers (*seito ni noboru*). This gives us joy. We are sent off by shouts of ‘Banzai!’ by our enthusiastic countrymen.” Despite the supposed “privacy” of Nagatani’s document, he continued to use popular discourse when defining even the most personal experiences of preparing for war. When his father visited him prior to departure, Nagatani exhorted himself to sacrifice for the war effort:

This is the end. If I stick to it and fall in battle with dignity, I think he will rejoice with me ... In reality, I couldn’t conceive the fact that I was going to war. We’re in the situation, however, when a few among us, perhaps a few dozen, perhaps the whole company, might come back as bleached bones. ... I promised that I would become a splendid man. I swear that, without fail, I will do this.

It may seem that Nagatani was the victim of the uncaring, invasive Japanese regime, but he is not unique. Because modern military forces realized that success in battle was determined as much by the serviceman’s dedication to his cause as it was by tactics and technology, acts of self-mobilization were equally prevalent in societies that presumably enjoyed “privacy” (the United States), suffered from invasions of “privacy” (the Soviet Union), and even those that supposedly lacked the concept of a “private sphere” altogether (China).⁴⁵

⁴⁴See Moore (2006).

⁴⁵American servicemen saw themselves as important participants in tremendous historical events. Prior to the American Division’s arrival at Guadalcanal, Captain Ralph T. Noonan wrote, “The grapevine says that this is the largest and longest convoy in history. A strange feeling to be part

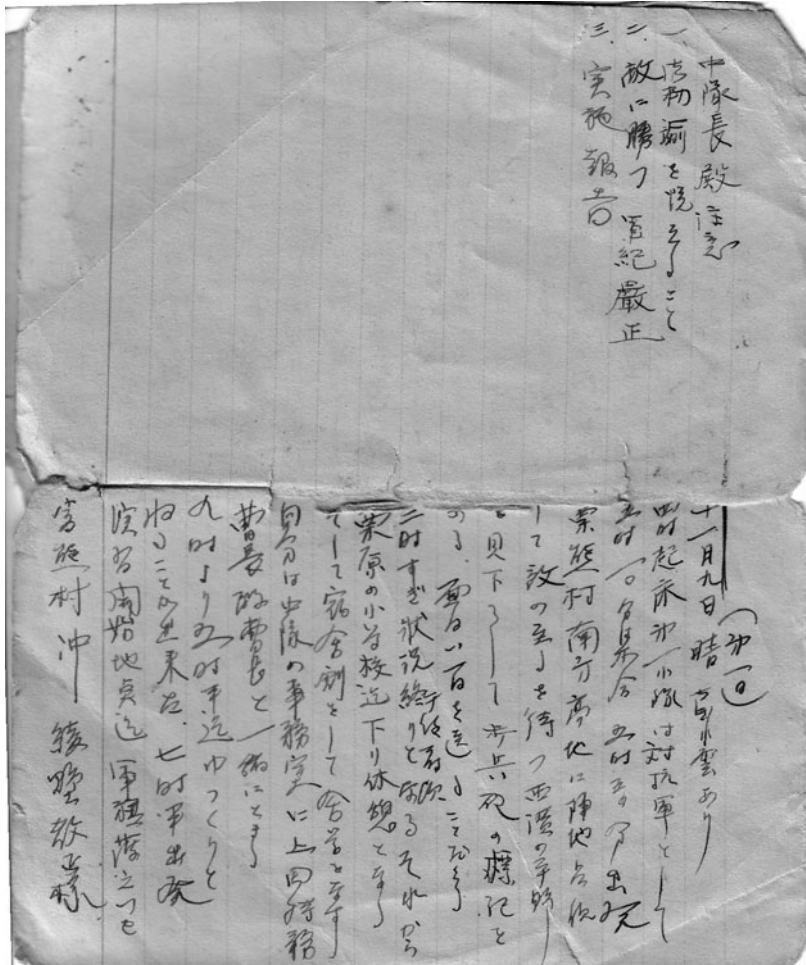


Figure 8. Diary of “Nagatani Masao.” Courtesy of Takamatsu City Peace Museum.

Nagatani’s confident style of self-narration, however, met stiff resistance when he actually began to experience the war against the GMD directly. Chinese units used concrete bunkers, irrigation canals, and alleyways to

of history.” See Ralph T. Noonan, “Daily Desk Calendar for 1942, a Date Guide,” January 22, 1942. This form of mobilizational rhetoric is identical to war reportage pieces such as Richard Tregaskis’s *Guadalcanal Diary*: “It’s the first time in history we’ve ever had a huge expedition of this kind accompanied by transports. It’s of world-wide importance. You’d be surprised if you knew how man people all over the world are following this. You cannot fail them” (1943, 21). Chinese field diaries also mirror contemporaneous reportage accounts: “The Japanese slaves (*wouu*) have tried every scheme and trick in the book, but they have only incited anger, so now they are going to try their last hand—military force! Because of this, our unit is on a heightened state of alert; my fellow countrymen are also unusually excited—all waiting for the opening of the War of Resistance so they can kill the enemy.” See “Di-3 dadui zhenzhong riji,” unsigned, July 21, 1937, Ministry of Defense Archives.

waylay Japanese units with mortars, light artillery, and submachine guns. Landing in Wusong (near Shanghai) on September 2, 1937, Nagatani was instantly unnerved: “I feel like I’m still on the boat—rocking and swaying. Everywhere you look, the place is brutally torn apart from air raids. I’m finally able to truly understand the price of war. This is how you know how horrible, how savage a thing it is.” Despite these disorienting experiences, he managed to reinscribe his patriotism even while recording the horrors around him:

I was filled with a sense of fortune and gratitude for having landed safely on this land, taken by the blood and tears of the marines and forward land units. I offered a small prayer to the spirits of the war dead and, facing towards the Emperor in the far, far East, while feeling how grateful I am for my country Japan, I was able to sense how horrible this thing called war really is.

Nogatani continued to suffer blows to his confidence as the war grew progressively brutal in Shanghai. He began to acknowledge changes in his mental and physical state that seemed to defy explanation: “When I’m relaying my orders [to the troops], no matter what, I can’t keep my voice steady, which is really shameful. I know I’m doing it, but my voice still shakes.” His unit participated in multiple massacres of Chinese civilians and POWs, and Nagatani’s “voice” became more and more infirm:

We got four more of them [captives] in the night. When we left for our night attacks, we shot three and sent one to the rear. At midnight, we were on alert. In the afternoon we attack, at night on alert. I’m getting a taste of how hard this thing called war really is. [One day later] Today at 7am, we made breakfast. Caught three more—killed them all. They straggle behind here and there, which is dangerous, so we have no choice. ... At one the 3rd, 4th and 7th took three hundred ... At five we tied up two hundred, shot them with a machinegun, and burned them with dry leaves. Then, some of them, who had only feigned death, started to run, so we stabbed them one by one. It felt horrible, like the “living hell.” People shot one after another, all kinds of people.

Nogatani had, in fact, suddenly drawn from Buddhist discourse in order to more accurately capture his experiences in language: In the Buddhist “living hell,” the demonic strong prey upon the defenseless weak as they flee in terror. It marked an important departure from his previous heroic narrative, and perhaps even a change in the way that he perceived himself and the Japanese armed forces. Three days later, Nagatani briefly lamented the Japanese Army’s inability to supply its men or care for the wounded. Over the following two days, his diary

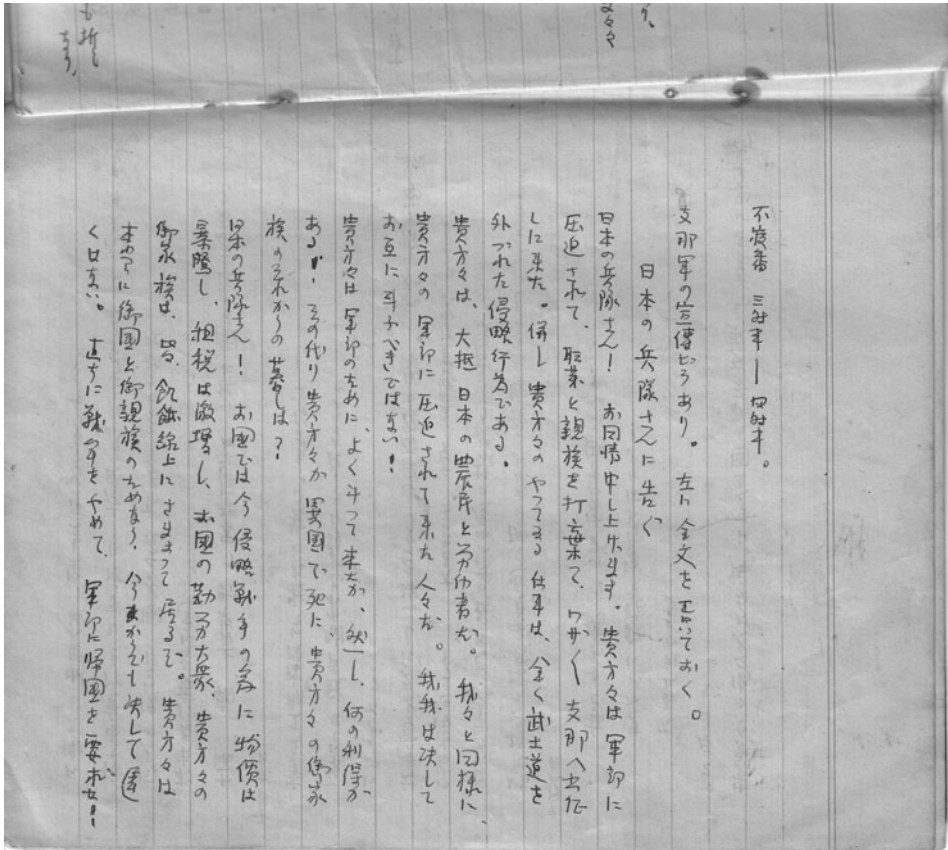


Figure 9. Diary of “Yamamoto Kenji.” Courtesy of Kusa no Ie Peace Museum.

became an almost passionless record of his comrades who had died. Finally, losing so many war buddies (*senyū*) nearly caused him to collapse in despair; drawing from his training in self-discipline, however, Nagatani still used his diary as a space to mobilize himself:

I thought everyone would go home ok, but now there’s just nothing I can do. Why this bad luck? I killed my boys (*buka*); there’s nothing I can say about it. I have to avenge them. If I don’t get back out there on the front and do my job, I just can’t take it. ... For better or for worse, I made it alive. I might live a little longer. I asked my parents to think of me as an honorable man if something bad happened to me. ... I have to stay alive to avenge my comrades.

In his diary, Nagatani used language to find the resolve necessary to lead his platoon back into battle; he pulled himself out of despondency by invoking a sense of obligation to his comrades, reassurances that his parents would be proud of him, and, finally, a desire for revenge. In fact, he had decided to reinscribe familiar tropes from wartime literature and propaganda that were

designed for social mobilization. Two days later, while Nagatani's unit drove north, he was shot in the head and died outside Luodian (near Shanghai). Knowing that the military police would burn the diary along with his body, Nagatani's comrade picked up the precious text from his friend's body and protected it for the remainder of his tour of duty. In this case, as in many others during the mobilization for total war, the consequence of self-discipline was death.⁴⁶

On the surface, it may appear that Nagatani's case is a strong one for the triumph of state, mass media, and military disciplinary forces, but Nagatani's words and deeds need not be evidence for a lack of agency; after all, he developed his own style of narrative on the battlefield in response to overwhelming personal experiences. It was a mixture of Buddhist, patriotic, military, and other discourses, but a composition that Nagatani cobbled together, a discursive bricolage, without disciplinary intervention. He wrote his self-narrative in a manner that he found personally compelling, not appealing to military, state, and media authorities, because they were not reading it. Nagatani was disciplining himself, and his voluntary participation in refining the methodology of discipline made its process more effective. Even in societies where the "private sphere" was continually violated by acts of discipline and punishment, such as the Soviet Union, servicemen tried to develop a "voice" that they found convincing.⁴⁷ Not all stories proceed the way Nagatani's did, however. In the case of infantry reservist Yamamoto Kenji, the potential for unpredictable individual responses to wartime conditions becomes even clearer.

On September 12, in Shikoku, Yamamoto reported to hear the names of those who had been assigned to active duty. When he heard his own name, he wrote, "There is no end to my happiness," and notified his father by telegram. He traveled toward Tadozu, sent off by enthusiastic cheers of flag-waving civilians as Nagatani had. At this point in the conflict, the social and state mechanisms supporting mobilization for total war were delivering thousands of young men to the front in Shanghai, and countless small boxes containing cremated remains back to their hometowns; given the timing of Yamamoto's arrival in Shanghai from Tadozu, in fact, it is likely that he was setting foot in China the same day that Nagatani's remains were being unloaded back in Tadozu from Shanghai. With no veterans returning alive from the front and so many being sent off amid cheers and flags, there were precious

⁴⁶See "Nogatani Masao," "Pocket Diary," Takamatsu City Peace Museum, August 24–25 and September 2–14, 1937. The circumstances of Nagatani's death were related to the archivists when his war buddy donated the diary.

⁴⁷Soviet army translator Vladimir Stezhenskii was already familiar with the armed forces, an educated man, and part of a family victimized by Stalin's regime; he was suspicious of official rhetoric and, in his diary, drew more from his studies in Moscow for composition. His thick prose was often acerbic and biting; when drafted he quickly wrote, "Once again I'm a small cog in the enormous, creaking, un-oiled machine that is called 'the Army.'" Still, he attempted to accept his role (even referring to it as part of his "destiny") as a serviceman by imagining himself "spending time in Europe, even at the end in Berlin" when he joined the ranks on October 5, 1941 (Stezhenskii 2005, 17).

few voices of concern or dissent in Japan. Nevertheless, as soon as he arrived in China, Yamamoto's voice of heroic resolve, which he adopted in his diary during his time as a reservist, crumbled even more quickly than had Nagatani's:

The remnants of fierce battles are everywhere. In wide, flat fields, you can see the white walls of destroyed homes, surrounded by trees. There are abandoned horses. On the bank of an irrigation canal, there was a dead child, and a bit further down, two adults' bodies with no heads had been carried to the bank by the stream. It is so horrible, I can't look.

Transport troops are moving ammunition and provisions on emaciated horses.

Yamamoto pushed the boundaries of his capacity for self-expression when trying to capture the sights, sounds, and other physical experiences of war. He described his unit scrambling down sopping wet dirt roads near Shanghai, staying in dirty, abandoned hovels. He complained of "the horrible stench from Chinese soldiers' corpses, collapsed on canal banks." Engineering officers had him digging trenches nearby, and he was kept awake by "gunshots which continued incessantly through the night."⁴⁸ Although the physical experience of war is ultimately indescribable, this did not stop servicemen around the world from pushing language to approximate it—regardless of whether the space for that language could be considered "public" or "private."⁴⁹

In order to combat these terrifying experiences, Yamamoto also drew on the heroic language of war reportage for his battle scenes: "The bombardment is a success, we've suffered no casualties!" The compulsion Yamamoto felt to accurately record his experience, however, could not be fully reconciled with a triumphalist narrative. The next morning, he advanced with his unit, "stepping

⁴⁸See "Yamamoto Kenji," "Jinchū nisshi," September 12–20 and 22, 1937, Kōchi: A Peace Museum Grass Roots House.

⁴⁹The need many servicemen felt to record the intense physical experiences during war is a transnational phenomenon. Forced on a ship to Japan with inadequate food, water, medicine and toilets, William Miner kept a bare record of the "most fantastic and horrible trip" of his life, scribbling on tiny notepads. The Japanese tried to humiliate men like Miner by making them lie in horse manure, and, after arriving in Japan, he was "buggered in rectum by Japs Med. Corps." Miner felt compelled to describe his life in Japanese custody even when he was on the brink of starvation. See William Miner, "Diary," December 27, 1944, and January 29, 1945. Chinese Nationalists, even in field diaries subject to review, tried to incorporate the physical dimension of their war experience directly into their narratives. When the battleship *Izumo* destroyed the Chinese defenses on the Yangtze River, a Chinese officer wrote, "When the mines exploded, the sound shook the heavens and all the glass in the surrounding houses shattered." As close-quarters fighting broke out in the cramped housing districts of Shanghai, this diarist described the "furious rifle reports from the Bazi Bridge" and how bullets "ricocheted around the houses in the surrounding area." See "Shanghai zuozhan riji," unsigned, August 17, 1937, Nanjing, Second Historical Archives.

on the corpses of dead Chinese soldiers” into a “nameless hamlet,” and his style of writing changed again:

It started to rain. We're covered with mud. Tanks advance. The korian stalks snap and crack, echoing in the field. Someone says: "I'm hit!" Someone else says: "XX is hit, he's wounded!" Advance, advance. My comrades are taken away, covered with blood, but nothing can be done. We only advance, advance.

As his difficult experiences increased, Yamamoto's language became increasingly broken and disturbed. He and his comrades went to bury the Chinese war dead; Yamamoto described them lying in piles in the trenches, their stomachs bloated and bodies stained with blood. Odd entries crept in, such as, "I touched one of their heads, and the brains came out." He listed his woeful experiences one by one: burying "indistinguishable" corpses of his comrades in the wind and rain while stricken with malaria; elderly Chinese civilians meandering behind Japanese lines, abandoned, hurt from shrapnel, or otherwise unable to flee; wounded men coming back from the front line "covered in blood, moaning on their stretchers—a terrible sight." Yamamoto, perhaps feeling the inadequacy of the patriotic rhetoric that had so thoroughly suffused his early entries, drew instead on the fiction and poetry that he enjoyed:

In a flooded rice paddy, I sit down to put pen to paper. The sunset is reminiscent of the famed paintings of Tai Xi. Here and there amongst the expansive cotton fields, there are clumps of korian growing tough and strong. The sun in the western sky burns like fire. The lake is quiet as clouds illuminated by dusk blow gently across the darkening sky. I am delighted by the white flowers on the banks and the gentleness of the reeds under the water. Under the trees of the bank, the cries of the butcher-birds have sometime gone silent. From time to time I hear gunshots from our side and theirs. The dull thudding sound of artillery explosions reverberates, but the view at sundown is silent.

The silence at the end of the day, combined with natural imagery, paints a soothing portrait. Yamamoto's creation of a peaceful space seems to be an indulgence in escapism. Later, when he heard news that his friend Kunizaki had died in battle, he once again fled from the terrible reality of war into the solitude of the natural world: "Kunizaki, how the hell did you die? Death! Was it real? I thought we would go on living together. Death! Was it real? ... Thinking about him, I couldn't get any sleep. That night the sky cleared, and the stars were shining." Even though he continually mobilized himself to despise Nationalist soldiers, Yamamoto now wrote sympathetically of the "pitiful children and old folks" who were caught up in the Japanese advance. Nearby Suzhou, his unit passed by three or four dead Chinese women and he wondered in horror, "Did Japanese

soldiers do this?” As he visited each dot on the map to Nanjing, Yamamoto wrote of the flowers, the people, the horror of war, often abandoning the paucity of prose for poetry: “I trod on the corpses of Chinese soldiers without care / for my heart had become wild and disturbed” (*araki kokoro*). He felt that he had been irrevocably changed by the battlefield, and his diary was a space in which he developed a lyrical and sometimes harsh voice with which to understand it.

Amazingly enough, Yamamoto, who had participated in several major battles in mainland China, survived. He was treated for malaria in the Second Field Hospital (Shanghai), where he bought a notebook in 1938 and began copying down his diary. During this period of convalescence, Yamamoto must have thought that his new narrative voice might appeal to the Japanese people, who were hungry for compelling firsthand accounts of the war. He submitted his poetry, simply entitled “Taking up the Gun” (*Jū wo toritsutsu*), and was notified that it would be published; Yamamoto proclaimed that this “gave me no end of joy”—the same phrase he had previously used when he was ordered to the front. He must have known, however, that there were limits on what was acceptable discourse in Japan at that time; it is unclear whether he fully understood what those limits were, or whether his prolonged exposure to the battlefield was to blame.

Tempted by literary fame like war reportage author Hino Ashihei, Yamamoto began censoring his own poetry in the back of his diary notebook by marking “X” next to questionable lines such as, “They say that the representatives of the Imperial Comfort Services buy women in Shanghai and then go home / Such a representative from my hometown departs without seeing the troops.” Indeed, Yamamoto was trying to refamiliarize himself with appropriate wartime discourse, but his months of exposure to a battlefield without newspapers or voices of authority had made its mark. Sometime in early 1938, he wrote a letter to schoolchildren in his home prefecture and copied those letters down in his diary. Examining the manner in which he delineated the salient categories of his experience in China, it is clear that he was having some difficulty developing an entirely acceptable voice:

I’ve leaped into canal beds, into the enemy camp, and stabbed Chinese soldiers to death. I’ve shot Chinese soldiers when they came to attack us at night, too. Also, while drinking soup made from chestnut husks when thirsty, chewing raw garlic and daikon when hungry, I shot the Chinese at close range while they fled. If I went on about the fighting and such, well, there’s a lot of fun stuff to tell, but, in order to maintain military discipline, they won’t let me write about it. Maybe when I come home I’ll tell you.

Even while acknowledging the threat of censorship, Yamamoto used inappropriate language in his attempt to communicate with the children. In his next letter, he told them that while they were playing and sleeping soundly

next to their mothers, many Chinese children (left behind or lost) lay crumpled dead next to burning buildings—others wandered aimlessly crying for their mothers.⁵⁰ Although Yamamoto was willing to engage in acts of self-censorship in order to appease editors and other authorities, the consequence of his self-discipline—adapting his language in order to capture his disgust for war—could not be erased. If nothing else, his diary remained as a reminder. In fact, his account of the horrors of warfare was so compelling that the diary was donated to a “peace museum” in Kōchi Prefecture in the postwar era.

It is unknown what Yamamoto would say if he were alive to read his diary to us today, but Okamoto Masa believed that, for all of the acts of censorship, self-censorship, and deliberate obfuscation involved in diary writing, these documents are not to be taken lightly. One should especially tread carefully when evaluating a supposedly “private” account: Political forces are at work perhaps even more effectively when the author believes that they are absent. Nonetheless, servicemen struggled to make language represent experience. One might ask, “What choice did they have but to mobilize themselves?” As the old saying goes, “We expect you to follow orders, whether you like it or not.” Complaining was rife within all the armed forces of the Second World War. While a drafted man was indeed required to report for duty, he was not usually required to keep a diary on the battlefield and, when he did decide to pen such a self-narrative, he engaged in voluntary acts of “self-discipline.”

In writing their diaries, they attempted to construct a self that helped them articulate experience, and this self both limited certain actions and opened up possibilities for others—both in support of and against the war effort. Their diaries became crucibles for cooking up highly individualized styles of narration, potentially employing bits and pieces from religious, patriotic, antiwar, and literary discourse. Servicemen came to embrace these new voices in part because of the tremendous “truth” that they believed diaries possessed. This belief is so powerful that we continue to ascribe authenticity to them today, and use them as bases for arguments both for and against the existence of war crimes, constructing psychological profiles of servicemen, and even lawsuits.⁵¹

In any event, servicemen’s efforts to construct a “language of their own” are integral to understanding the position of the individual during the

⁵⁰Yamamoto, September 23–26; October 1, 14; November 13, 22, 27, 31 [*sic*]; December 1, 1937, poetry notes (at the end of his diary) from “Taking up the Gun,” 1938 (the exact date of composition for the letters is unclear).

⁵¹After the active service notebook was lost by Azuma, he was successfully sued for libel by someone mentioned in his writings in 1996 (upheld on appeal in 1998), and his more literary “diary” was publicly demeaned as a fabrication. See Azuma Shirō-san no Nankin saiban wo sasaeru kai (2001, 45–52, 68–70). Chinese Nationalist prosecutors also used “reliable” diaries as evidence in “Chinese traitor” (*hanjian*) trials in early postwar Nationalist China (1945–49). See “Jianshen hanjian-an” [Investigating Cases Involving Traitors], discussion from August 29, 1946, Taipei, National Archives (Xingzhengyuan).

mobilization for total war, but “self-discipline” also cuts to the heart of broader questions surrounding agency and subjectivity in the age of the modern disciplinary state. If servicemen were not usually required to keep diaries on the battlefield, and sometimes punished for doing so, why did they write them? Why was it necessary to articulate an opinion in support of or in opposition to the state? Even though levels of “privacy” need not make diaries any more or less “reliable” as historical evidence, these texts were both tools for and evidence of individuals telling themselves what to think and how to behave. If that is indeed the case, the individual’s proactive support of state programs is as important as the state’s tools of intimidation and censorship. The concept of “privacy” is merely the illusion claiming that forces such as the state, mass media, and military are somehow not active in our most intimate spaces. Unfortunately, this line of thinking not only grants external disciplinary forces more strength with which to train individuals—indirectly through “private” spaces such as diaries—but also encourages the individual to believe that he is swept up unwillingly into historical events and is not responsible for his actions during those extreme times. A close reading of diaries reveals that the author, whether writing a “public” or “private” text, plays an active role in selecting the materials that compose his subjectivity.

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Pursuant to confidentiality agreements that I have made, some names of the diarists have been replaced with pseudonyms. These names are put in quotations when first introduced. All translations from Chinese, Japanese, and Russian are mine unless otherwise stated.

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